

## **Moran Introduces Legislation**

## **to Preserve the Tallgrass Prairie**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Jerry Moran introduced legislation this week, H.R. 5118, the Flint Hills Preservation Act, to protect the ability of landowners in the Flint Hills to use prescribed fire as a tool to preserve the tallgrass prairie ecosystem.

The Flint Hills region of Kansas and Oklahoma contains the world's largest share of remaining tallgrass prairie, and is the only place where that habitat exists in landscape proportions. Only four percent of North America's presettlement tallgrass prairie survives to this day, and 80 percent is located in Kansas.

Each year, ranchers, landowners and conservation groups use prescribed fires to mimic the seasonal fires that have shaped the tallgrass prairie for thousands of years. Prescribed burning is an essential management practice for protecting the ecosystem, enhancing grazing land and reducing the chances of destructive wildfires such as those in California and other states. Prescribed burning is also an important component in ranchland management. It helps ranchers keep pastures free from invasive species, like eastern red cedars, and leads to higher quality grass that increases weight gain in their cattle.

Last year, a condensed timeframe for grassland burning caused heightened air quality readings in Kansas City and Wichita. As a result, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is seeking to regulate how and when landowners can burn in the Flint Hills region by asking the state of Kansas to develop a smoke management plan. H.R. 5118 recognizes that prescribed fires are a necessary and natural phenomena. It exempts landowners and local governments from EPA enforcement of Clean Air Act standards, if the enforcement action is attributed to smoke from prescribed fires in the Flint Hills region.

“The Flint Hills region is one of the last contiguous stretches of the tallgrass prairie in the United States. It is disappointing that the EPA would try to disrupt a vital management tool like prescribed fires,” said Moran. “This legislation will allow landowners to preserve a unique ecosystem and manage prescribed burning around the forces of weather and other factors impacting safe conditions, without worrying about a schedule dictated by some EPA bureaucrat in Washington.”

“We applaud Congressman Moran’s initiative to correct a flaw in the Clean Air Act with this legislation,” said Kansas Livestock Association President Mark Smith. “Prescribed burning in the Flint Hills is a proven, economical tool that protects and enhances the tallgrass prairie. Smoke that results from this practice should not cause regulatory compliance problems for our urban neighbors.”

Moran is a senior member of the House Agriculture Committee.

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